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Central Intelligence Agency
Office of the Deputy Director for Intelligence

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DDI-1

14 April 1983

NOTE TO: Tom Cormack
Executive Secretary

FROM : Deputy Director for Intelligence

Attached is our more detailed response
to the Director's question on Angola and
the Clark Amendment.



Robert M. Gates

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ALA M 83-10060

14 April 1983

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: ANGOLA: Impact of Clark Amendment []

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1. The following is the DDI's response to your request for information concerning the insurgency in Angola and the impact of the Clark Amendment. This memorandum supplements the one we provided yesterday on the subject. []

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2. The Clark Amendment, prohibiting the granting of US security assistance to insurgent groups in Angola without express Congressional authorization, was originally introduced in December 1975, approved by the Senate in February 1976, and signed into law by the President at the end of June 1976. The debate in the US over the Clark Amendment during this period held the attention of the contending forces in Angola, but in our judgment the legislation had little effect on the fighting there. []

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3. Background. The Alvor accord, in which Portugal promised independence to a transitional government comprised of Angola's three major guerrilla groups, began to break down almost immediately after it was signed in January 1975. The three groups--the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), and the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)--were ethnic and ideological rivals. The MPLA at that time enjoyed important advantages over the other two movements. An urban-based group--it was especially strong in and around the capital city, Luanda--the MPLA was supported by a majority of educated Angolans. Its leader, Agostinho Neto, was a well-educated Marxist who had been able to submerge factional differences within the organization. []

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4. The MPLA in 1975 thus had a considerable edge over its rivals in regard to leadership and political organization. It was also able to absorb foreign assistance more readily than its competitors. It benefited both from Soviet aid and from a pro-MPLA bias among many Portuguese officials in Angola. []

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5. The FNLA, ethnically the most narrowly-based of the three competing groups, drew its support almost exclusively from the Bakongo people in northern Angola and southwestern Zaire. Under Holden Roberto, the FNLA was generally considered the most pro-Western of Angola's liberation groups. It received materiel support from neighboring Zaire and considerable assistance from Beijing. Despite organizational and leadership weaknesses that ultimately proved fatal to the FNLA, at independence (November 1975) it still had a fairly strong military force. []

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6. UNITA, formed by Jonas Savimbi in 1966 after he had broken away from the FNLA, as of 1975 was the smallest of the three groups. Militarily it was by far the weakest, in terms of both manpower and foreign support. UNITA's potential at the time rested largely on the abilities of its charismatic leader, Jonas Savimbi, and on its ability to draw support from the country's largest tribal group, the Ovimbundu. These factors would prove to be important long-term assets. [redacted]

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7. The Military Struggle. The first clashes among the groups occurred in early 1975 and mostly involved the FNLA and the MPLA. In February and March 1975, the FNLA seemed to have the military advantage and was frequently on the attack. But Soviet military aid to the MPLA began to increase at around that time, and the military balance soon shifted. Shortly thereafter, it became apparent that the types and amounts of weapons being acquired by the MPLA--including artillery, rockets, and recoilless rifles--could not be matched by their opponents. Nor could the FNLA and UNITA compete with the MPLA's superior organizational and combat skills. By mid-1975 the MPLA was consistently able to take the offensive. MPLA successes, first against the FNLA in the north and later against UNITA in the south, forced the latter groups to form an uneasy coalition. [redacted]

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8. Cuban intervention on the side of the MPLA beginning in the early fall of 1975 greatly enhanced the MPLA's military position. The FNLA-UNITA coalition sought assistance from South Africa. Pretoria responded first with arms and training, and during the fall it sent in around 1,500 troops. FNLA forces in the north--supported by Zairian troops--and South African, UNITA, and some FNLA troops advancing from the south temporarily succeeded in turning the tide of battle against the MPLA by the end of October 1975. This led the Soviets to mount a major airlift of arms and Cuban troops into Angola during the last two months or so of 1975. The Cubans had around 11,000 troops in Angola by December. [redacted]

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9. The massive Cuban intervention dramatically turned the tide in favor of the MPLA in early 1976. Major defeats were inflicted on the ill-disciplined FNLA and Zairian troops in the north. The Cuban and MPLA forces did not fare nearly as well at first against South African and UNITA forces in the south, but Pretoria's decision to withdraw its troops starting in January 1976--in part because of the controversy in the US Congress over continued aid to UNITA and the FNLA--was followed by major MPLA and Cuban gains against UNITA. [redacted]

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10. The Clark Amendment. The Clark Amendment, in our judgment, did not have a decisive effect on the military situation. It is our assessment that greater outside aid to UNITA and/or the FNLA would not have enabled them to defeat the MPLA and Cuban forces. [redacted]

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11. The large Soviet military aid effort and particularly the introduction of thousands of Cuban combat troops were the most important

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factors in determining the military outcome in 1976. Without the Clark Amendment, South African forces might well have remained involved in the conflict for a time, but it is debatable whether Pretoria would have been willing over the long term to pay the domestic and international political costs of a protracted struggle. In any case, it is doubtful that the South Africans could have matched the Soviet and Cuban effort. They probably concluded by early 1976 that the forces they were backing could not win. [REDACTED]

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12. Subsequent Developments. By mid-February 1976, Savimbi's forces had retreated into a remote area of southeastern Angola, which became the base for their long-term guerrilla struggle against the Cuban-backed regime. In [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] South Africa now appears to be UNITA's only major external backer, but the organization has continued to develop politically and militarily and today it poses a serious threat to the MPLA regime. [REDACTED]

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13. FNLA forces, for their part, retreated in 1976 to the bush in northern Angola and into southern Zaire. The FNLA is now virtually moribund, beset by factionalism, poor leadership, and lack of outside support. It poses no threat to the MPLA. [REDACTED]

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SUBJECT: ANGOLA: Impact of Clark Amendment

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